



By: TA | AP Insight

Can the ceasefire between Pakistan and Afghanistan become permanent?



Pakistan and Afghanistan on Wednesday declared a temporary pause in escalating fighting, two days after Kabul blamed Islamabad for a deadly airstrike in the Afghan capital that it said **killed hundreds of people** at a drug rehabilitation hospital.

Both said they were suspending fighting before Muslim holiday Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy month of Ramadan, and at the request of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar.

The three countries have been trying to mediate a cessation of hostilities since Afghanistan and Pakistan renewed **cross-border fighting** in February, and had also been involved in helping broker a ceasefire between the two in October.

The announcements came shortly after Afghan authorities held a mass funeral in Kabul for some of the victims killed in Monday's strike.

Pakistani Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said that the suspension of strikes on Afghanistan would take effect at midnight Wednesday and remain in place until midnight Monday.

"Pakistan offers this gesture in good faith and in keeping with the Islamic norms," Tarar said in a statement.

However, he said that "in case of any cross-border attack, drone attack or any terrorist incident inside Pakistan," the operations will immediately resume with renewed intensity.

Afghanistan's government spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, didn't specify a time frame for the pause on the Afghan side. But he said that his country "will respond courageously to any aggression in the event of a threat."

Military installations targeted, Pakistan says

Pakistan has rejected Afghanistan's accusation that it targeted the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital, insisting its strikes in Kabul and

eastern Afghanistan Monday had been against military facilities.

It has dismissed Afghan claims of hundreds of people killed as propaganda.

Monday's attack in Kabul was the deadliest in a conflict that has been escalating between the two neighbors since late February.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a safe haven for militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan

Afghan officials have put the death toll at 408 people, with 265 wounded. The toll couldn't be independently verified.

The fighting has seen repeated **cross-border clashes** as well as airstrikes inside Afghanistan, including several in the capital, despite international calls for a ceasefire.

Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of providing a safe haven for militants who carry out attacks inside Pakistan, especially for the **Pakistani Taliban**.

The group is separate but closely allied with the Afghan Taliban, which took over Afghanistan in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops. Kabul denies the charge.

Mass funeral in Kabul

Bulldozers dug pits in a Kabul cemetery before Wednesday's mass funeral, which Health Ministry spokesman Sharafat Zaman said was for more than 50 people whose remains couldn't be identified.

Light rain fell as ambulances lined up outside the cemetery and began unloading dozens of plain wooden caskets. Some contained the remains of more than one person, Zaman said.

The 2,000-bed Omid hospital was hit at

around 9 p.m. on Monday. It had been renamed and expanded in size roughly a year ago from a previously existing treatment facility as part of the Taliban government's efforts to stamp out a significant drug addiction problem in the country.

The strike caused an intense fire at the hospital

Afghanistan's vast poppy fields have been the source of much of the world's heroin, which in combination with decades of conflict and widespread poverty has fueled drug addiction that the country's government has vowed to combat.

The site, near Kabul's international airport, is adjacent to a former NATO military base, Camp Phoenix, where U.S. forces used to train the **Afghan National Army**. It wasn't immediately clear what was now housed at the site.

The strike caused an intense fire at the hospital, with footage from local television showing rescue crews combing through the wreckage with flashlights late into the night as firefighters struggled to extinguish the blaze.

Pakistan warns Afghanistan to make a choice

In an interview with The Associated Press in Islamabad earlier Wednesday before he announced the pause in fighting, Tarar said Pakistan had "only targeted terrorist infrastructure."

"We have just gone after the Afghan Taliban regime, their military setups, their terrorist infrastructure, and all the setups which are supporting or promoting terrorists," Tarar said.



Pakistan declared last month that it's in "open war" with Afghanistan

He told the AP that Pakistan's strikes "have been very precise and these strikes were carried out in an ammunition depot in Kabul. In the aftermath of which, we saw fumes and flames in the atmosphere in Kabul."

He said the subsequent loss of life, which he did not quantify, occurred "because there was ammunition, there were technical equipment, there were arms there in that depot."

Tarar said Pakistan has given a clear choice to Afghanistan's government: "Either you are with Pakistan or you are with the terrorists. So, they will have to make a choice, and they will have to make the choice very soon," he said.

Bodies were still being pulled from the smoldering **remains of the hospital** on Tuesday morning.

Mujahid, the Afghan government spokesman, condemned the strike, accusing Pakistan of "targeting hospitals and civilian sites to perpetrate horrors." He said those killed were "innocent civilians and addicts."

The fighting, the most severe between the two neighbors, began after Afghanistan launched cross-border attacks in response to Pakistani airstrikes about three weeks ago.

The clashes disrupted a ceasefire **brokered by Qatar** in October, after earlier fighting killed dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants.

Pakistan declared last month that it's in "open

war” with Afghanistan. The conflict has alarmed the international community, particularly as the area is one where other militant organizations, including al-Qaida and the Islamic State group, still have a presence and have been trying to resurface.